

Position Profile



Amherst, MA

Town Manager

The Community

The Town of Amherst is considered by many to be the quintessential New England “college town” hosting Amherst College, Hampshire College, and the flagship campus of the University of Massachusetts. The Town is a diverse, inclusive community offering numerous educational and cultural opportunities, and it enjoys a tradition of open, professional, and high level of government services, quality education, support for open space and agriculture, and respect for its history.

Amherst was incorporated in 1759 splitting from the Town of Hadley. Amherst is 27.7 square miles in size and with approximately 38,000 official residents the most populous community in Hampshire County, where neighboring Northampton is the county seat. However, the Town’s daytime population is estimated to more than double in size during the academic year. Located in the Pioneer Valley of Western Massachusetts, Amherst is 23 miles from Springfield, MA, 18 miles from Greenfield, MA, 50 miles from Pittsfield, MA, 87 miles from Boston and 157 miles from New York City.

The presence of the University of Massachusetts and the two colleges profoundly impacts the overall economy and the development patterns within Amherst. The community is primarily residential, accounting for 90% of the property value of the Town. There is a substantial amount of non-taxable property belonging to the University and the colleges. Commercial development occurs within some village centers but primarily within the central business district of downtown Amherst, which is considered to be an asset of the Town in creating vibrancy and a sense of community. The Town also has a

considerable amount of protected agricultural land and conservation land.

The top three employers in the Town are the University, Amherst College and Hampshire College with a combined total of approximately 8,000 employees. These institutions through their workforce and their students create the underpinning of the local economy. Unemployment, at about 4%, is generally not an issue in Amherst, as the employment levels of the higher education institutions remain relatively stable.

In addition to the draw of the University and colleges, Amherst has a very active cultural community of writers, artists, and musicians. The Town is also home to a number of museums including the Beneski Museum of Natural History, the Emily Dickinson Museum, the Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art, the Mead Art Museum at Amherst College, the National Yiddish Book Center, the University Museum of Contemporary Art and the University of Massachusetts W.E.B. Du Bois Library.

Amherst is proudly a diverse community as compared to other Massachusetts cities and towns. According to the 2010 US Census, the Town racial makeup was 76.9% white, 11% Asian, 7.3% Hispanic or Latino, and 5.4% Black or African American. The schools serve 40 different language groups who are learning English as a new language.

While the Town’s per capita income is one of the lowest in the state at \$19,796, due to the inclusion of a large college student population, the median family income at \$96,733 is one of the higher in the state. Median household income at \$53,191 is lower than the state average, which includes renter and occupied units. However, owner-occupied units had household incomes that were more than four times higher than those

that were renter-occupied. As of 2013 33% of the population was considered to be below poverty, and 50% of the school population is eligible for free or reduced lunch. In short, the data indicates a disparity of income, which has been described as a “barbell” with large groupings in higher and lower income groups as compared to more middle-income groupings.

The Town is demographically younger than the state as a whole with the major differences being in the 5-19 years cohort with Amherst at nearly 31% versus 19% for the state. Families with preK-12 school age children have decreased significantly over the past ten years. While in the 65 years and older cohort Amherst has 6.6% of its population versus 14% for the state, there is a sense within segments of the Town that the aging of the population, and its attractiveness as a retirement community, has produced an increase in the senior population that will continue and shift these percentages.

Educational attainment is a prominent characteristic of Amherst. Nearly 67% of the population has a Bachelor’s Degree or higher, with nearly 43% holding a graduate or professional degree. By comparison, just over 39% in the state have a bachelor’s degree or higher, and only 17% holding a graduate or professional degree.

Amherst citizens are deeply engaged in public policy issues facing the Town, and beyond. There is a high level of political activity through voting, volunteering on citizen committees, elected offices, and participation in community meetings and forums. It is important to note that this engagement is characterized not only by the amount of the activity but also its depth.

The Town is well covered by local media with two daily newspapers, a locally

developed blog and an active three channel local cable access system that also streams many meetings at www.amherstmedia.org, as well as a robust municipal website at www.amherstma.gov

The Government

Amherst’s government is comprised of a five member Select Board that serves as the Town’s executive board, and a 254 member Representative Town Meeting that serves as the legislative body of the Town, which is chaired by an elected Town Moderator. The membership of the Representative Town Meeting includes 240 elected representatives from 10 precincts and 14 ex-officio members, including the Town Manager. There is also an elected School Committee, which oversees the operation of the Town’s preK-6 school system and regional partnership with three neighboring towns for grades 7-12, an elected Board of Library Trustees, which oversees three public libraries, and a Moderator-appointed Finance Committee, which advises Town Meeting in accordance with state law. The Town also utilizes a large number of appointed boards and commissions, with various modes of appointment, to conduct municipal operation.

The Select Board are deemed by the Town Government Act to be the chief elected officials of the Town; and are generally intended to act through broad policy guidelines which are to be implemented by Town employees. The Select Board appoints the position of Town Manager as the chief administrative and fiscal officer of all Town agencies, other than the Schools and the Library. The Town has had a total of five Town Managers since 1951. The current vacancy results from the unexpected passing of a well-respected Town Manager of only five years, who had also served five years as Finance Director.

The Town Manager is responsible for executing the policy directives of the Select Board and for managing the operations and activities of the Town. The Town Manager is specifically responsible for the appointment and removal of members to certain boards and commissions and employees of the Town with the exception of employees of the School Department and the Public Library, collective bargaining and administration of a personnel system, preparation of operating and capital budgets, procurement, supervision of town properties excepting those of the School Department and Library, and the reorganization of Town agencies under his/her jurisdiction.

The Amherst Town Government Act detailing the government structure is available online at:

<https://www.amherstma.gov/DocumentCenter/Home/View/19197>

An organizational chart of the Amherst Town Government can be found at: <https://www.amherstma.gov/DocumentCenter/Home/View/11>

The Town of Amherst provides general governmental services for the territory within its boundaries including water services to 95% of the population of the Town, sewer services to 90% of the population of the Town, public education, libraries, streets, and parks and recreation, including two outdoor pools and a pond, and a municipal golf course. The Town also owns over 2,000 acres of conservation land with approximately 80 miles of trails, and over 1,841 acres of land restricted to agricultural/farmland use.

The Town also provides public safety services through police and fire services. The Police Department is an accredited agency by the Massachusetts Police Accreditation Commission. The two station Fire Department provides fire and EMS service to

the Town, the University and two colleges, and EMS service to four neighboring towns.

Finances

Amherst's finances are strong and stable, holding a Standard and Poor's rating of AA+, with a stable outlook, based upon a credit analysis of January 2015. The rating was based upon the considered strength of the local economy, budgetary flexibility, budgetary performance, liquidity, management conditions, and debt level. In FY16 the total budget for the Town is approximately \$82.75 million. Total debt for the Town is approximately \$21 million. The Town does have a retirement liability of approximately \$48 million but that is on schedule to be retired by 2033. OPEB liability is currently estimated to be approximately \$96 million, however, the Town is currently holding over \$2 million in trust for this liability and adding to this fund on an annual basis, as well as currently fully funding the annual required contributions (ARC) to water and sewer enterprise OPEB costs, and making annual contributions to general fund ARCs. The Town currently has Stabilization Fund reserves of \$4.2 million, and \$4.8 million in certified Free Cash.

The most recent S & P Credit Analysis is available online at:

<http://www.amherstma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/30545>

Challenges and Opportunities

- **Capital Needs.** Like many communities the Town has infrastructure issues as programmatic needs have changed and facilities have aged. Currently, the Town is looking toward a new consolidated elementary school, expanded main library, new main fire station, and a new public works facility. Additionally, there

is a growing call for addressing space issues of the senior center. These large facility needs are in addition to normal required capital investment in roads, equipment, and building maintenance projects. A comprehensive plan is required in order to implement these projects in a financially and politically feasible manner.

- **Finances.** While the Town is financially strong the array of capital needs, outstanding pension OPEB liabilities, and service needs require that the Town maintain its steady direction and careful fiscal planning. The Town has been fortunate over the past several years to have a strong finance team with the prior Town Manager having served as Finance Director before being appointed to the Manager position and then a strong successor in the Director position who has recently made a career move to another community. An immediate need will be to fill this Finance Director position.
- **Housing.** Amherst has exceeded the state's 10% affordable housing threshold since 1987, and has been recognized statewide for its pro-active stance for affordable housing.
Amherst seeks to maintain affordability for all of its residents especially those of lower income so as to maintain a diverse community, as made clear in the Master Plan developed with hundreds of community participants. A variety of pressures, in particular off campus student housing has pushed housing costs upwards resulting in a challenge for lower income individuals and families wishing to stay or locate within Amherst. A successful rental registration program has both increased housing safety and helped address some neighborhood quality of life concerns caused by single family home conversion to student

rentals. A church hosts a seasonal homeless shelter created with Town funds.

- **Development.** The Town is facing fiscal pressures of funding capital needs, new demands for services and retiree-based liabilities. Currently, 90% of the tax base is residential. Accordingly, any increased revenues needed to fund expenditures related to these financial pressures only make the Town less affordable. The Town has recently hired its first Economic Development Director to assist in growing the commercial base. Opportunities do exist with a vibrant central business district, notable village centers in the North and South, and potential for collaboration with UMass for economic expansion related to research based spin-offs. The challenge of development will be to address concerns that proposed projects are balanced to meet expectations of sustainable growth and in keeping with the land use values of the community, and neighborhood stability.
- **University/College Relations.** The University and two colleges play an important role in the definition of the Town of Amherst. The University, by virtue of its size, is almost a city within the Town, and maintains a separate police force. The University and colleges are important drivers of the economic and cultural environment of the Town, which is generally beneficial in providing for the quality of life in the Town that many find attractive. However, there are also negative effects related to demands for services, non-taxable property, impacts upon housing prices, and burdened infrastructure. These are in the classic sense standard Town and Gown issues, perhaps magnified by size within a small New England town. There has been some increased sense of partnership

between the institutions and the Town over the past several years including a written partnership agreement with the University. Most notably, the creation of the University Town of Amherst Collaborative (UTAC) has increased dialogue between the Town government and the University community (<http://www.umass.edu/utac/>). Continued negotiations and partnership dialogues are considered to be an important priority moving forward.

- **Social Issues.** While the Town has low unemployment and benefits from a certain level of prosperity, and recognizes and values diversity within the community, there is an identification of social issues that require attention. Specifically, the Town does recognize certain issues of poverty within the Town, maintaining or increasing affordable housing, generational issues for youth and seniors, and support for diversity and social justice, including a relatively new initiative, Amherst Together, with a website at www.amhersttogether.org
- **Citizen Engagement.** The Town embraces civic engagement as reflected in high levels of political participation and discourse. And, the Town does wish to move forward on a number of different issues as described. The challenge that has been identified is to maintain that level of discourse and engagement while also acting effectively to find and implement solutions to many of these challenging issues.
- **Form of Government.** Related to the challenge and virtue of civic engagement are questions regarding the appropriate form of government. To this end the Town is considering an elected Charter Commission to review the current form of government and the related legislative and executive structures.

The Ideal Candidate

The Select Board seeks a municipal administrator with significant managerial experience. The successful candidate must be able to demonstrate prior success in managing a complex municipal organization in a highly engaged community. The candidate should be competent in all areas of municipal management and operations, but especially finance and planning.

The Town Manager should be intellectually curious and open to change, new ideas, and practices in order to help develop and implement a vision and goals for moving the Town forward with creativity, unity, enthusiasm and optimism.

Additionally, the Town Manager must be a strong and decisive leader who can work collaboratively with various interests of the Town, including board and committee members, municipal and school department heads, staff members, and especially residents. The Manager is expected to encourage and support continued positive school/town relationships, and to work and negotiate cooperatively with the business community including the Business Improvement District (BID) and the Amherst Area Chamber of Commerce, as well as the three institutions of higher education within the Town.

The Town Manager must be able to delegate effectively, mentor department heads, and provide support and motivation to ensure high performance and professional growth by all municipal employees with accountability to insure results for self and staff. In many respects the Manager is a coach and conductor of the orchestra that is the larger municipal organization. The Manager must possess strong interpersonal skills and be

able, in all forms, to communicate clearly and effectively with all constituencies.

Specific personal and professional qualities are priorities for the Select Board, municipal staff, and citizens. These qualities include: accessibility, patience, transparency, and regular, clear communication in dealing with all constituencies (employees, boards, committees, citizenry, business owners); ability to actively listen and engage; ability to focus on problems and empower the staff to solve problems; fairness and kindness in dealing with employees and concern for employee welfare; fairness in dealings with citizens and concern for citizen welfare; and a willingness to recognize and compliment superior contributions from staff and volunteers.

The Town Manager must also possess and demonstrate successful experience in labor relations and personnel management. In particular the Manager must be able to continue to recruit “first-class” staff, as the Town is generally recognized for the high quality of its employees. He or she must be able to develop and sustain credible relations with employees and multiple union representatives, being firm in negotiations but also recognized as a fair and honest broker with a reputation of being dependable and consistent.

The Town is seeking a professional with a passion for local government and in particular, the Town of Amherst. The successful candidate must be collaborative and inclusive, able to respond to political and community pressure with positive and respectful, professional strategies and a ready and appropriate sense of humor.

The successful candidate should possess a Master’s degree in a field related to municipal

management, and at least 10 years of progressive experience as a Town or City Manager or Administrator, or Assistant Town or City Manager or Administrator, or education and experience in or with municipal government that is equivalent. The successful candidate must possess demonstrated skills, abilities and knowledge in municipal finance, personnel administration, labor relations, municipal procurement, community planning and economic development, and intergovernmental relations.

Compensation

The Town of Amherst will offer an employment agreement and compensation package that is competitive with comparable Massachusetts’ communities, with a salary range of \$155,000+, depending on qualifications. An attractive benefits package, including health and retirement plans, is part of the Town Manager’s total compensation. Residency is preferred, but subject to negotiation.

To Apply

Resumes, in confidence, by March 10, 2016 to:

Amherst, MA-Town Manager Search
Community Paradigm Associates
One Saddleback
Plymouth, MA 02360

ELECTRONIC SUBMISSION PREFERRED:

blynch@communityparadigm.com

Following the closing date, resumes will be reviewed according to the outlined qualifications. A Select Board appointed Town Manager Screening Committee will interview the most qualified candidates in confidence. Based upon these interviews a selection of finalists will be chosen for further evaluation and reference checks and then forwarded to the Select Board for interviews and consideration before a final selection is made. Finalists will be contacted for references and approval of background reviews before their selection is publicly advanced to the Select Board

Amherst is an EEO/AA employer

Questions regarding the position should be directed to Bernard Lynch, Principal, Community Paradigm Associates at blynch@communityparadigm.com, or 978-621-6733



Photo by Larry Kelley